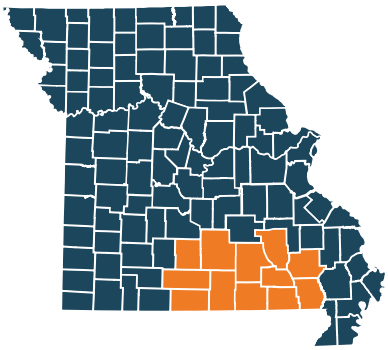


COMMUTING PROFILE
SOUTH CENTRAL REGION
JULY 2026

Overview

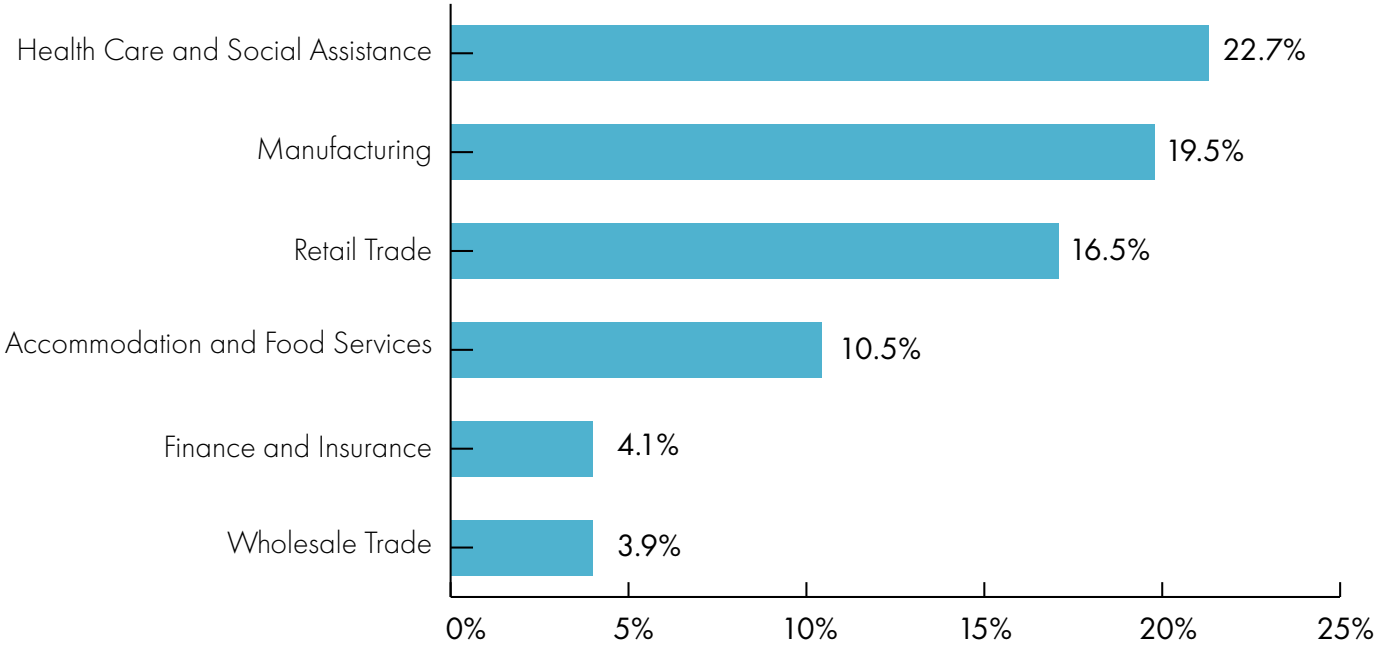
The South Central Workforce Development Area (WDA) consists of 12 counties: Butler, Carter, Douglas, Howell, Oregon, Ozark, Reynolds, Ripley, Shannon, Texas, Wayne, and Wright. Poplar Bluff and West Plains are among the largest cities in the region. In 2023, there were 44,078 total private primary jobs** in the South Central WDA, making up 1.9 percent of private primary jobs in Missouri. Nearly half (49.2%) of the workers employed in the region were aged 30 to 54. Workers aged 29 or younger were 26.7 percent of the workforce and those 55 or older were 24.1 percent. In 2023, 44.2 percent of private primary jobs paid between $1,251 and $3,333 per month in the South Central WDA and 35.6 percent paid more than $3,333 per month. The remaining 20.2 percent paid $1,250 per month or less. In 2023, there were more women (51.5%) than men (48.5%) in the South Central WDA workforce.

In 2023, 32.8 percent of employees living in the South Central WDA commuted fewer than 10 miles to work, 30.6 percent of workers commuted more than 50 miles, 21.2 percent traveled 10 to 24 miles, and 15.4 percent commuted 25 to 50 miles.

Industry

Health Care and Social Assistance was the largest employing industry in the region with 9,995 jobs (22.7% of total private primary jobs in the region). *Manufacturing, Retail Trade,* and *Accommodation and Food Services* were other major industry sectors having at least 10 percent of the region's employment share. Poplar Bluff, West Plains, and Mountain Grove were the top cities for employment in the South Central WDA.

Top South Central WDA Industry - Private Primary Jobs Percentage



Where the South Central WDA Labor Force Works and Lives

Of the 44,078 workers employed in the South Central WDA in 2023, 71.5 percent commuted to work from within the region. The remainder (28.5%) commuted into South Central WDA from homes outside of the region.

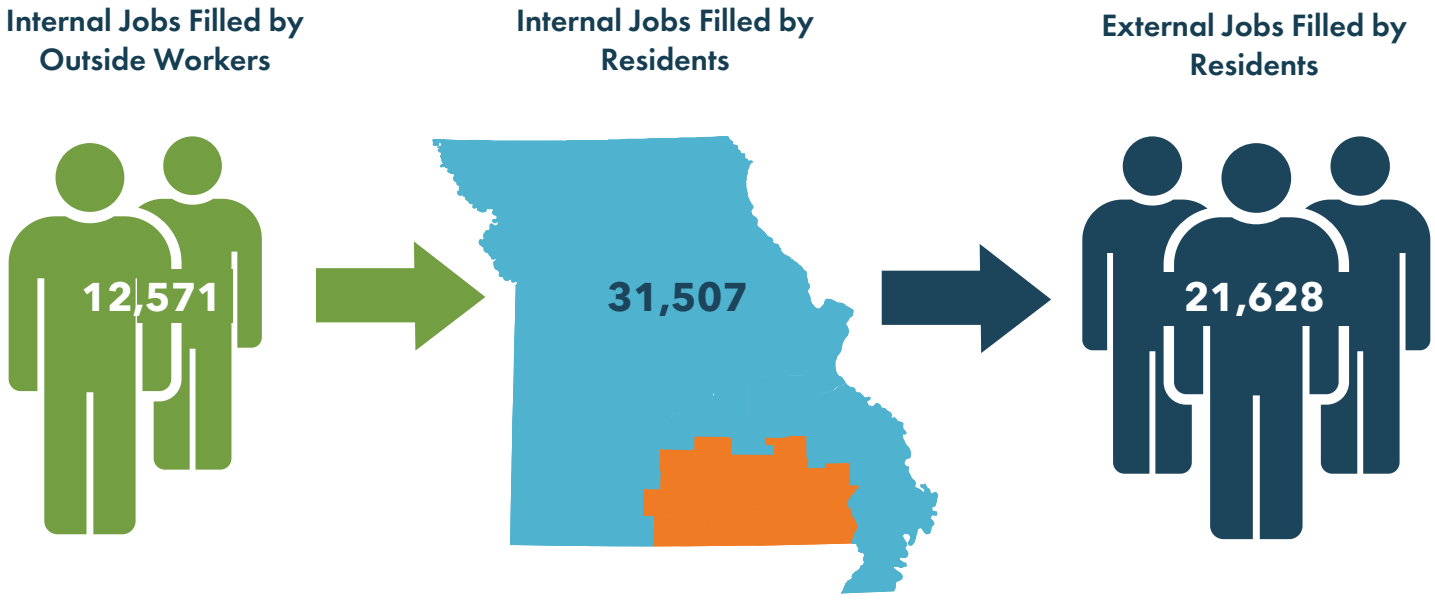
Description	2023	
	Count	Share
South Central WDA Labor Market Size (Private Primary Jobs)		
Employed in the South Central WDA	44,078	100.0%
Living in the South Central WDA	53,135	120.5%
Net Job Inflow (+) or Outflow (-)	-9,057	-
In-Area Labor Force Efficiency (Private Primary Jobs)		
Living in the South Central WDA	53,135	100.0%
Living and Employed in the South Central WDA	31,507	59.3%
Living in the South Central WDA but Employed Outside	21,628	40.7%
In-Area Employment Efficiency (Private Primary Jobs)		
Employed in the South Central WDA	44,078	100.0%
Employed and Living in the South Central WDA	31,507	71.5%
Employed in the South Central WDA but Living Outside	12,571	28.5%

Of the region's residents who were in the workforce, 40.7 percent, or 21,628, commuted to jobs outside of the region. The South Central WDA attracted 12,571 workers from outside of the region. More than 31,500 South Central WDA residents lived and worked in the region.

The top five Missouri counties where Central WDA workers resided (in descending order) were Howell, Butler, Texas, Wright, and Ripley.

Inflow/Outflow

Overall, 53,135 employees lived in the South Central WDA and 44,078 workers were employed in the region, resulting in a net outflow of 9,057 workers from the region.



The following table shows the worker composition for the job inflow and outflow groups as well as worker characteristics of the interior job flow. Of the 31,507 individuals who lived and worked in the region, 26.1 percent were aged 29 years or younger, 49.6 percent were aged 30 to 54 years, and 24.3 percent were aged 55 years or older. More than half (51.9%) worked in the *Services* industry.

South Central WDA Description	2023	
	Count	Share
Outflow Job Characteristics (Private Primary Jobs)		
External Jobs Filled by Residents	21,628	100.0%
Workers Aged 29 or younger	5,966	27.6%
Workers Aged 30 to 54	10,791	49.9%
Workers Aged 55 or older	4,871	22.5%
Workers Earning $1,250 per month or less	3,935	18.2%
Workers Earning $1,251 to $3,333 per month	7,992	37.0%
Workers Earning More than $3,333 per month	9,701	44.9%
Workers in the "Goods Producing" Industry Class	4,908	22.7%
Workers in the "Trade, Transportation, and Utilities" Industry Class	6,861	31.7%
Workers in the "All Other Services" Industry Class	9,859	45.6%
Inflow Job Characteristics (Private Primary Jobs)		
Internal Jobs Filled by Outside Workers	12,571	100.0%
Workers Aged 29 or younger	3,524	28.0%
Workers Aged 30 to 54	6,067	48.3%
Workers Aged 55 or older	2,980	23.7%
Workers Earning $1,250 per month or less	2,712	21.6%
Workers Earning $1,251 to $3,333 per month	5,023	40.0%
Workers Earning More than $3,333 per month	4,836	38.5%
Workers in the "Goods Producing" Industry Class	2,454	19.5%
Workers in the "Trade, Transportation, and Utilities" Industry Class	4,233	33.7%
Workers in the "All Other Services" Industry Class	5,884	46.8%
Interior Flow Job Characteristics (Private Primary Jobs)		
Internal Jobs Filled by Residents	31,507	100.0%
Workers Aged 29 or younger	8,233	26.1%
Workers Aged 30 to 54	15,622	49.6%
Workers Aged 55 or older	7,652	24.3%
Workers Earning $1,250 per month or less	6,182	19.6%
Workers Earning $1,251 to $3,333 per month	14,479	46.0%
Workers Earning More than $3,333 per month	10,846	34.4%
Workers in the "Goods Producing" Industry Class	8,768	27.8%
Workers in the "Trade, Transportation, and Utilities" Industry Class	6,372	20.2%
Workers in the "All Other Services" Industry Class	16,367	51.9%

Commuter Pattern

The top 10 counties where South Central WDA workers living in the region are employed at their private primary jobs (in descending order) were Howell, Butler, Greene, Texas, Wright, St. Louis County, Ripley, Stoddard, Oregon, and Douglas.

The table below indicates that many resident workers commuted to another county for employment. All but Butler and Howell counties had at least half of their residents commuting outside their county of residence for work. Larger cities, such as Poplar Bluff and West Plains, attracted workers from the surrounding counties. The South Central WDA's access to U.S. Highway 60 improves the ability of region's residents to commute to their workplace.

South Central WDA			
Percent of South Central WDA Residents Working Outside of Home County			
Butler	**44%**	**Reynolds**	**60%**
Carter	**72%**	**Ripley**	**68%**
Douglas	**74%**	**Shannon**	**67%**
Howell	**38%**	**Texas**	**69%**
Oregon	**67%**	**Wayne**	**74%**
Ozark	**75%**	**Wright**	**70%**

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, OnTheMap Application and LEHD Origin-Destination Employment Statistics (LODES), (Beginning of Quarter Employment, 2nd Quarter of 2023*), URL: https://onthemap.ces.census.gov/

**2023 is the latest year for which LEHD Origin-Destination Employment Statistics (commuting data) is available from the U.S. Census Bureau. To maintain the consistency of data in this report, all relevant data used is also from 2023, although later data for some data points was available.*

LEHD data infrastructure tracks jobs as its primary unit instead of people. As such, the system naturally captures more than one job per person when available in the data. The **dominant (or primary) job for an individual is defined as the job that earned the individual the most money. Constructed this way, ***the number of primary jobs should be equal to the number of workers.***

This report was prepared by the staff of the Missouri Economic Research and Information Center (MERIC). All data in this report was current at the time of publication and is subject to revision. This workforce product was funded by a grant awarded by the U.S. Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration. The product was created by the recipient and does not necessarily reflect the official position of the U.S. Department of Labor. The U.S. Department of Labor makes no guarantees, warranties, or assurances of any kind, express or implied, with respect to such information, including any information on linked sites and including, but not limited to, accuracy of the information or its completeness, timeliness, usefulness, adequacy, continued availability, or ownership. This product is copyrighted by the institution that created it. Internal use by an organization and/or personal use by an individual for non-commercial purposes is permissible. All other uses require the prior authorization of the copyright owner.